

Amendments to the Claims:

Claims 1 -18 (Cancelled).

19. (Currently Amended) A method of accessing a surgical target site, comprising the steps of:

creating an initial distraction corridor through tissue extending between an incision point and a surgical target site via an initial distraction assembly including a K-wire and at least one dilator capable of being slideably passed over said K-wire;

distracting said tissue from said initial distraction corridor to a secondary distraction corridor with an instrument capable of being guided to said surgical target site along said at least one dilator of said initial distraction assembly~~and~~;

introducing a plurality of retractor blades for retracting said tissue from said secondary distraction corridor to create an operative corridor to said surgical target site; and

providing a control unit capable of electrically stimulating at least one stimulation electrode provided on said initial distraction assembly, sensing a response of a nerve depolarized by said stimulation, determining at least one of nerve proximity and nerve direction from said initial distraction assembly to the nerve based upon the sensed response, and communicating to a user at least one of visual indicia and audio communications representing at least one of said determined nerve proximity and said determined nerve direction.

20. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 19, wherein said instrument capable of being guided to said surgical target site along said at least one dilator of said initial distraction assembly comprises a secondary distraction system.

21. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 20, wherein said secondary distraction system includes at least two speculum blades capable of being moved generally apart from one another.

22. (Currently Amended) A method of accessing a surgical target site, comprising the steps of:

creating an operative corridor through tissue extending between an incision point and a surgical target site via a distraction assembly and a retraction assembly, wherein said distraction assembly comprises an initial assembly including an elongate inner element and at least one dilator, said distraction assembly further comprises a secondary instrument advanceable to said

surgical target site along said at least one dilator of said initial assembly, and wherein at least one of said distraction assembly and retraction assembly includes at least one stimulation electrode; electrically stimulating said at least one stimulation electrode; sensing a response of a nerve depolarized by said stimulation; determining at least one of nerve proximity and nerve direction of said nerve relative to at least one of said distraction assembly and said retraction assembly based upon the sensed response; and communicating indicia to a user representing at least one of said determined nerve proximity and said determined nerve direction.

23. (Cancelled)

24. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 22, wherein said operative corridor is established to a spinal target site.

25. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 22, wherein said operative corridor is established to a spinal target site via a lateral, trans-psoas approach.

26. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 22, wherein communicating to a user includes displaying at least one of alpha-numeric characters, light-emitting elements and graphics representing an electromyographic (EMG) response of the muscle.

27. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 22, wherein communicating to a user includes audibly communicating sounds representing an electromyographic (EMG) response of the muscle.

28. (Cancelled)

29. (Currently Amended) The method of claim [[19]] 22, wherein said step of determining at least one of nerve proximity and nerve direction includes determining a threshold stimulation level required to evoke said neuromuscular response and wherein said step of determining a threshold stimulation level includes establishing first a bracket containing said threshold

stimulation level and bisecting said bracket to form a smaller second bracket containing said threshold stimulation level.